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**Andrew L. COPE (ed.), *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music***

**Andy Brown**

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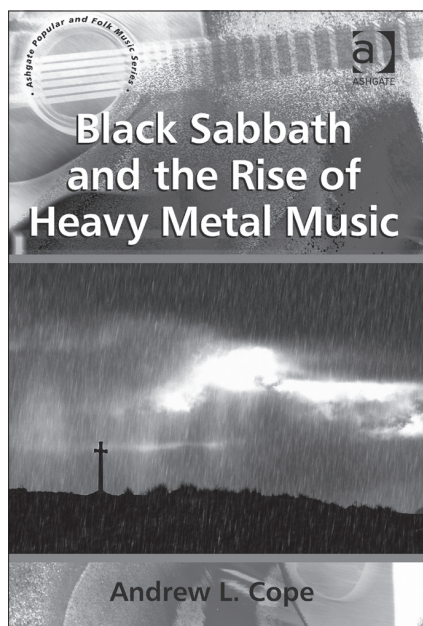
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**Andrew. L. Cope, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, 172 p.**

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GIVEN THE CURRENT, almost universally held belief, that *Black Sabbath* single-handedly invented the genre of heavy metal music, then a musicological study which closely examines the musical syntax and compositional aesthetics of the band's classic period (the so-called "Ozzy Years"), is surely to be welcomed. Andrew Cope seems well-equipped to offer such an analysis, not only through spending 'many years listening to' and learning their songs, as a musician. But also being able to closely observe Tony Iommi's (Sabbath's guitarist) playing technique by 'being at the stage front, of several Black Sabbath gigs in the early to mid 1970s' (p. 31). This close observation provides clear corroboration that Iommi's factory accident did necessitate the guitarist developing a technique for playing chords with the index and little finger, resulting in a 'chord with no 3<sup>rd</sup>, a kind of mutant chord with no major/minor tonality' which, when combined with the heavier timbre achieving by down-tuning (therefore making strings easier to manipulate), evolved into the Sabbath signature, modal, episodic, power chord "heaviness" which is now "heard" as definitive of the heavy metal "sound". But Cope shows, through close song analysis, that the experimentation with lower tunings was a musical strategy developed over the course of the writing, performance and recording of the classic Sabbath albums. The same is true of the thematic contribution of Geezer Butler's lyrics; the band may have stumbled on the Black Sabbath moniker but the exploration of dark and gothic-tinged themes evolved in conjunction with the musical syntax, producing something that sounded uniquely disturbing to contemporary ears.

The book is driven by the strong conviction that all roads metal really do flow from Sabbath's pioneer blueprint. The key musicological strategy is to identify the 'rules that define heavy metal as a genre and its distinction from heavy [or hard] rock.' (p.1) For Cope, this crucially involves distinguishing the 'musical syntax and aesthetics' of Black Sabbath from that of Led Zeppelin, because the former established the unique musical coding of heavy metal via 'radical and extensive transgressions of the blues and rock and roll context of their origins' (op cit, 1-2), whilst Zeppelin faithfully retained these generic stylisations, thereby perpetuating such codes in the work of subsequent bands, who took their influence from one or the other. To this end, Cope employs a conception of the 'core and periphery model' of genre formation and mutation, identifying 'key' codes that appear to be present in all forms of metal (the core) and peripheral codes that become important in the formation of sub-genres. These include 'specific textual and timbral elements that result from the use of down-tuned and seven string guitars, guitars heavily laden with distortion, palm-muting and aggressive performance techniques' (p.44). Cope argues that it is the combined coding of Black Sabbath and subsequently the hard rock revivalist, NWOBHM, that is 'ubiquitous' in the subsequent development and proliferation of contemporary metal styles'. Indeed the stability of metal as a genre style, is signified by the frequent re-emphasizing of these key musical codes in different combinations, for example, in bands such as Metallica, Arch Enemy, Cradle of Filth and Machine Head. For Cope, musicology offers a full-proof method of identifying the generic-code or



'finger print' according to which bands are 'considered to be heavy metal (or not)', the 'core' features of which are the:

"collocation of key intervals such as the tritone and flat 2<sup>nd</sup>, modal riffs and melodies, down-tuned guitars, sequences of power-chords and lyrics about Satan, the occult, the supernatural and related phenomena such as suffering and death, the horrors of war, good versus evil, nightmares and fantastic monsters/creatures (82-3)."

Pursuing the argument that the 'combined coding of Black Sabbath and the NWOBHM has become ubiquitous as the established coding of heavy metal' (p. 6) might seem persuasive in its claim for musicological dichotomy. But, as the author observes, 'Judas Priest display little of the core syntactical devices initiated by

Black Sabbath such as down-tuned guitars, tritons, flat 2nds, and so on. Riffs in the work of Judas Priest tend to be linear rather than angular, and many riffs and leads utilize blues devices' (110). Or 'If heavy metal is understood in terms of Sabbathian coding, then much of Motorhead's output is, arguably, not heavy metal at all but seems to be more related to the hard rock genre' (96). Yet Cope's musicological insights can also prove surprising, such as noting that the musical context of Black Sabbath not only contained Chicken Shack, Ten Years After's Alvin Lee's restricted tri-tone style and other blues-boom bands, but also film soundtracks notable for their riff-based compositions, such as John Barry's James Bond theme; although it is debatable if this musical influence stretched to Shostakovich's *String Quartet No. 8 Op 110!* (pp. 45, 52).

Most controversially, Cope's claim for a musicological 'dichotomy' that distinguishes heavy metal from hard rock is one that absolves heavy metal from the frequently leveled claims of sexism and misogyny, since the 'gender anxiety' definitive of the blues coding of hard rock, are simply absent from metal's obsessions with Satanism, war and the collective failures of organized humanity to perfect social institutions. This distinction clears the way for Cope to dispute the applicability of Walser's performative typologies of types of metal masculinity: misogyny, exscription, androgeny and romance (ch.3). While Cope is right to criticize the applicability of such representations, as derived from 1980s MTV videos, the purchase of *exscription* is surely still wholly justified by a the plethora of bands who do not *do gender*, of any kind and by so doing implicate a gender 'order' untouched by feminism? While Cope's celebratory account of the *rise and rise* of female metal musicians is surely a positive sign it is not simply explainable in terms of a musicological core of metal that by being Satanist or Satanist sub-

ject-oriented is somehow, because anti-Christian, also anti-hegemonic.

Given the occasional historically-located observational insights offered by Cope it is somewhat disappointing that the book does not offer a 'first-person' or participant ethnography of the Birmingham or 'brum beat' scene and early 70s rock culture, given that Cope was clearly a rock fan at this time, as well as a practising musician (it would, in this respect, be important to consider that the term heavy metal was uncommon at this time). Certainly one of the weaknesses of the book is the reliance on a quite limited (and well trodden) range of 'contextual' sources: often poor quality (interlocuter-penned) autobiographies, pay-by-the-word 'biographies' and the

like, which really don't offer a balance to the musicology of the book. Although one aspect that Cope rightly is able to unpack from the biographies of (Sabbath drummer) Bill Ward and that of Lemmy of Motorhead, is an aggressive playing style that reflects and channels a common experience of class inequality.

"The war-torn desolation of Aston, dead end prospects and boring school seemed to inspire a music that was steeped in rage. [Similarly] the rabid verocity evident in much of Motorhead's style seems to mirror [...] similar circumstances and evoke the same angry response to patriarchal based hegemony' (97)."

Andy R. BROWN

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**Karl Spracklen, Andy R. Brown et Keith Kahn Harris (ed.), « Metal studies? Cultural Research in the heavy metal scene », *Journal For Cultural Research*, vol. 15, n°3, 2011.**

CE NUMÉRO DE *Journal For Cultural Research*, « Metal studies? Cultural Research in the heavy metal scene » a été publié en 2011 et est dirigé par trois des chercheurs les plus prolifiques dans les études consacrées au metal, Karl Spracklen, Andy R. Brown et Keith Kahn Harris. La thématique du numéro fut proposée à Scott Wilson, Managing Editor de la revue suite au premier colloque entièrement consacré au heavy metal en 2008 à Salzbouurg (*Heavy Fundamentalism. Music, metal and politics*).

Au-delà des actes de colloque des premières conférences sur le metal, les chercheurs voulaient faire le point sur les « metal studies » en construction, en posant comme hypothèse que le heavy metal (comme d'autres cultures

liées aux musiques populaires) était un marqueur controversé et contesté d'une culture de résistance et, simultanément, d'une conformité subculturelle (p. 209). Point d'étape crucial dans la structuration des recherches, le numéro de la revue est articulé en deux parties. La première apporte des éléments théoriques ainsi qu'un état des lieux et des enjeux de ce qu'on pourrait entendre par « metal studies ». La seconde propose des contributions liées à des enquêtes de terrain, afin de mettre en évidence ce que pourraient être « les metal studies » et de quelle manière elles contribuent à la fois à la recherche en sciences sociales et à une connaissance heuristique des pratiques culturelles liées au metal.